

Joint Standards Committee

13 June 2018

Report of the Monitoring Officer

Review of Complaints for the last Municipal Year

Summary

1. This annual report provides an overview of the standards complaints received during the previous municipal year.

Complaints received

2. The table below describes the complaints handled during the last municipal year.

City or Parish	Complainant	Date accepted	Outcome	Date concluded	Category
Parish	Member of public	18/4/2017 (ongoing at year end 2016/17)	Referred for investigation but discontinued after Cllr resigned	26/6/2017	Disrespect Disrepute
City	Whistleblowing complaint led to standards issues begin referred	30/8/2017	Assessment sub referred for investigation		Disrepute Confidentiality
City	Councillor	21/10/2017	No action merited	2/11/2017	Disrespect
City	External report led to standards complaint being made		Assessment sub. NFA	23/02/2018	Disrepute Disrespect

City	External report led to standards complaint being made		Assessment sub NFA	23/02/2018	Disrepute Disrespect
City	Self	26/01/2018	Assessment sub. NFA	23/02/2018	Failure to declare
City	Member of public	26/01/2018	Assessment sub NFA	23/02/2018	Failure to register
City	Member of public	23/2/2018	Assessment sub -Informal steps required re minor breach	16/03/18	Failure to declare
Parish	Parish Councillor	16/02/2018	MO decision. No breach. Apology offered for any inadvertent offence	26/03/2018	Disrespect Disrepute
City	Member of public	5/03/2018	MO decision No breach	28/3/2018	Disrespect Disrepute
City	Member of public	15/03/2018	MO decision. Informal action	29/03/2018	Failure to register
Parish	Member of public	07/03/2018	MO decision. Informal action .	19/04/2018	Disrespect Failure to register
City	Councillor	31/3/2018	Referred for investigation		Confidentiality

3. The volume of complaints is slightly higher than in recent years as shown below:

Year	Number of Complaints Received
2017/18	12

2016/17	9
2015/16	9
2014/15	11
2013/14	5
2012/13	7

4. Two of the new complaints related to Parish Councillors and the rest concerned City Councillors. Although last year there were significantly more Parish complaints this number is in line with the general trend over a number of years. Given the large number of Parish Councillors they are significantly under represented in relation to volume of complaints received as compared with City Councillors. That is a picture which has been consistent for many years.
5. The table below provides historical information on the breakdown of complaints. In that table some complaints relate to more than one Councillor but are recorded only once. Similarly, multiple complaints relating to the same matter are recorded only once.

Year	City Councillor complaints	Parish Councillor complaints
2017/18	10	2
2016/17	3	6
2015/16	7	2
2014/15	9	2
2013/14	2	3
2012/13	7	0

6. The Parish complaints during 2017/18 both related to different Councillors. In contrast three City Councillors were each the subject of two complaints. One of those complaints is under investigation. No formal action resulted from the others although

informal advice was given. None of the councillors concerned had been the subject of a complaint in the previous year. One Parish and two City councillors were though the subject of complaints in both 2016/17 and 2017/18.

7. As in previous years the most common reason for a complaint was that a Member had allegedly failed to treat someone with respect or had brought the Council into disrepute. There were though a significantly higher number of complaints relating to the registration or declaration of interest than in previous years. A number of complaints were made regarding registration of political party membership. Two complaints (neither of which have concluded) also included allegations relating to the handling of confidential information.
8. Two of the complaints against City councillors were instigated by fellow Councillors. A further three (affecting four Members) were referred to standards from within the Council but after an external investigator had identified potential breaches of the code. One Parish complaints came from a Parish Councillor. One Member of the public submitted separate complaints against two Councillors.
9. Three investigations were initiated during 2017/18. There were none in the previous year but had been three in both 2014/15 and 2015/16. For the first time one investigation has been outsourced to an experienced firm of solicitors who specialise in standards matters. Other investigations have been handled in house.
10. No hearings took place during the year.
11. Three of the five cases dealt with under delegated powers by the Monitoring Officer were resolved within two weeks. The others took a little over three and five weeks respectively. This process involves clarifying the complaint if necessary, consultation with the independent persons and consideration and response by the Monitoring Officer. On average, cases referred to an Assessment sub committee took longer.
12. The case which is subject to external investigation has been ongoing for longer than any case handled by the Committee in recent years. While the timescale involved is not by any means out of line with timescales involved when investigations were carried out nationally, the Committee may wish to review this at some point in the future.

Recommendations

13. Members are recommended to:

- 1) Note the report
- 2) Consider whether there are any issues raised by this review which require farther consideration as part of the Committee's work plan.

Reason: To ensure that the Committee continues to make an effective contribution to ethical standards within the City Council.

Contact Details

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Report
Approved

Date 31/05/18

Wards Affected

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes:

None

Background Papers:

None